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In this column, we discuss the latest developments in ed-tech, as well as tried and tested apps and platforms, and the integration between teaching and technology. We invite readers to submit articles on their areas of interest. Please contact the editor before submitting.

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Implementing Input-based TBLT at Elementary Level Through 'Puzzle Rooms'

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Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is arguably an effective method of English teaching (Ellis et al., 2019). Students learning under a TBLT approach complete tasks that focus on meaning rather than grammatical form, and the goal is something more than just getting the right answer. However, the question of how to implement such meaning-focused tasks with students who are at a very low level has been difficult to answer. One possible solution is to focus on input-based tasks, where students focus on reading and listening in a meaning-focused way. The following activity (see Figure 1) is one idea that I have used to implement this sort of task in elementary classrooms using ICT facilities that are widely available in many schools.

Figure 1

An Example of a Finished Puzzle Room



Creating Your Puzzle Room

This task requires you to create a *puzzle room* with various English hints scattered around it that students can use to discover a secret code or password (see Figure 1). Students can use these to solve a puzzle to complete the task, such as for opening a treasure box. The puzzle rooms are built using various elements of the freely available *Google Suite*, in particular *Google Slides* and *Google Sites*. I made my first one by following a tutorial I found on YouTube (Dill, 2020). The tutorial is for making escape rooms, but the principle is very similar. The room is made using a single slide in Google Slides. You can find a picture that is licensed as free to use online, or take a photograph of a real room and use that as I did. This slide is then embedded on the homepage of a Google Site by clicking *embed* and adding the URL of the slide. An important point here is to change the word *edit* in the URL to "preview," as this ensures that the slide will be full screen when accessed.

Links to different pages on the same site are then attached to the various objects in the room (see Figure 2). These should contain clues to help students find the code to open the box. There can be other pictures inserted into the main one, or shapes that you insert to cover features in the picture, made clickable by using "fill color" and "transparent". You then click the *add link* button on the toolbar while these objects are selected, and these links will be inserted as additional pages on the Google Site that you have made (Figure 3).

Figure 2

Example Screen of Embedding Your Slide's URL

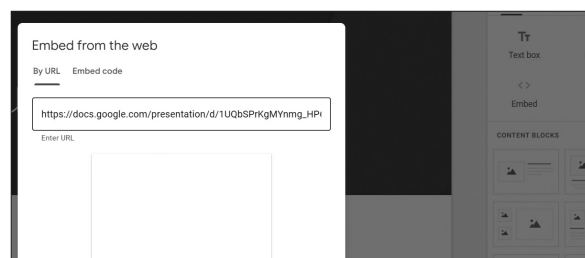
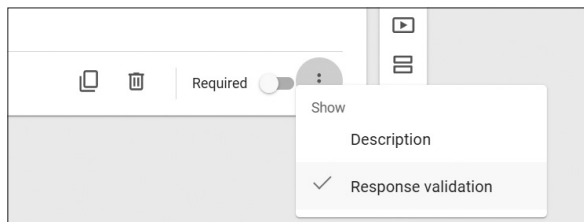


Figure 3
Fill Color and Add Link Buttons



You can also add sound files for listening hints. To do this, click *insert* and *audio* and upload your chosen file. Finally, entering the code to open the box requires a link to a Google Form set up to accept only one answer. To do this, make a form with only one question. You have to click on the three dots next to your question and select *response validation* (see Figure 4). This allows you to choose one correct answer. You then click *add section* and add another section with a victory message (and perhaps a picture of an opened treasure box), which students will automatically move to after entering the correct code.

Figure 4
Response Validation



The key difference from the YouTube tutorial referenced above is that you are making an EFL exercise—specifically, a task-based one. The exact hints you set will depend on your students' level, but they should not all practice a single grammar form. They should be varied and challenging for your students, requiring them to read or listen more than once and engage with the actual meaning of the hints for them to succeed. In this way, even though there is little in the way of meaningful output, the activity still qualifies as a true task according to generally accepted definitions (Ellis et al., 2019).

Implementation in Class

If you have a device for each student, they can work on it individually. However, the task works well in pairs or small groups. You can demonstrate the task by showing how to click on the box and entering a false code. You could also open a single hint to give them an idea of what they are looking

for, but students should endeavor to discover things for themselves. For added motivation, you can also make the task competitive to see which student/pair/group finishes first. Those that have finished can then help any classmates that are struggling. While students are solving the puzzles, you can monitor them to see which hints students find the most challenging. Then, at the end of the task, you can focus on those hints and go through the form and meaning so that everyone understands.

Conclusion

I have found this method to be a very effective way of introducing task-based learning into a low-level, elementary school context. The students all seem to find the task highly enjoyable and engaging. When on task, they are clearly engaging with the hints in a meaning-focused way. As such, I believe it is very effective as part of their English learning.

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Using Microsoft Teams as an LMS: A Free LMS Option for Microsoft 365 Users

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Microsoft Teams can be used as a learning management system (LMS), but the application is not considered an LMS nor is it marketed as one. It is a collaboration app that is designed to keep people connected, and its core functions do not offer the features that educators expect of an LMS. Moreover, literature about using Teams as an LMS that is available online is limited. However, with some workarounds and if used in conjunction with other online learning resources and digital content creation tools, Teams can be manipulated to act like an LMS and be implemented in a language course.

Why Use Microsoft Teams as an LMS?

Pricing is a factor that institutions and educators consider when deciding on an LMS to use. Using Teams as an LMS is an economical option for institutions that provide Microsoft 365 accounts to their educators and students and for educators that are looking for an alternative and more cost-effective LMS.

How to Use Teams as an LMS

To use Teams as an LMS, it is necessary to be familiar with both Microsoft Teams and Microsoft OneNote. For anyone unfamiliar with Teams and how to create a team in the app, information can be found online (Microsoft Teams, n.d.). There are also websites with information about how to set up a OneNote Class Notebook and link it to Teams (Microsoft Education for Teams, n.d.). For those with little experience using Teams and OneNote, to make the following section of this article a little easier to follow, it is important to understand one of the ways in which the two apps integrate. Microsoft Teams and Microsoft OneNote are separate apps. However, when you create a Class Notebook within Teams, you are creating a OneNote Class Notebook. After a OneNote Class Notebook has been created in Teams, it can be accessed and modified in either of the apps, and changes made to a notebook in one app will be reflected in the other app. The OneNote app has more features, so after creation and initial set up of a Class Notebook in Teams, teachers should edit the notebook in the OneNote app rather than the Teams app. Students, however, need only to interact with class notebooks through Teams.

Making a Course Homepage

The course homepage is an essential element of an LMS, as it is where students get information about lessons and access to learning materials and activities. Microsoft Teams, however, does not have a course homepage. As of 2022, Teams does have a “home page,” but functionality is limited (Microsoft Education Team, 2022). However, there is a workaround to this issue, and that is to use a OneNote Class Notebook as the course homepage. To illustrate how this is done, I will explain how I used a OneNote notebook in Teams as the course homepage for an English Communication class that I taught.

First, I created a team for my class in Teams, added the class’s students to the team using the students’ Microsoft 365 email addresses, set up a class OneNote class notebook, and then I took the following steps to set up the course homepage:

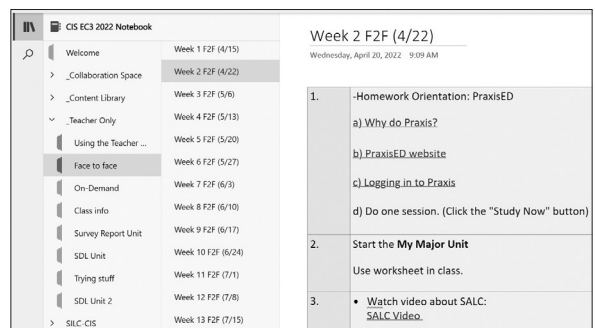
In the Teacher Only section of the notebook, I created 30 pages, one for each class of the semester. In each page, I created a table containing the materials and activities to be used in each of the classes (see Figure 1). Note that the Teacher Only section does not appear in the student view.

Before the start of a class, I copied the class’s page from the Teacher Only section into the Content Library section. Students can access pages in the Content Library pages, but they cannot edit them.

In this way, it is possible for a teacher to plan out the whole semester in the Teacher Only section, and then make classes visible to students, when necessary, by copying them into the Content Library section, and it becomes the course homepage for students.

Figure 1

A Semester’s Classes in the Teacher Only Section of the Class Notebook



How Students Access the Course Homepage

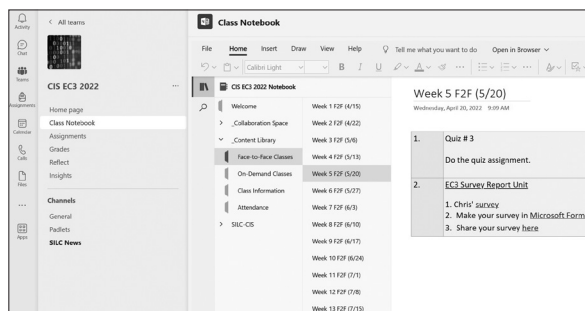
Figure 2 is a screenshot of what my course homepage looks like to students. The screenshot is of a (dummy) student that has accessed Week 5’s face-to-face class. Using Figure 2 as a reference, I will explain the steps that a student would take to access the page, with each step progressing from the left side of the image to the right side:

1. Sign into the Teams app. (I recommend students use the web version of the app over the desktop version of the app because there seem to be fewer syncing issues when using the web version.)
2. On the far-left side of the Teams window, click the Teams tab, which is highlighted in Figure 2. Though not visible here, a list of the student’s teams would appear, and they would click on their English class’s team, and in this case the team titled CIS EC3 2022.
3. Click on Class Notebook.

4. Click on the icon of the three vertical books that is located above the magnifying glass icon. This step is important because clicking on the icon is what opens the OneNote Class Notebook within Teams.
5. Click on Content Library.
6. Click on the Face-to-Face Classes section.
7. Click on the page titled Week 5 F2F (5/20)

Having taken these steps, my students will see, on the right-hand side, a general breakdown of Week 5's class and what activities they will be doing, along with links for any external resources they will use. Though students need to do a fair bit of clicking to access a class page, the procedure is straightforward, and students get used to it quickly.

Figure 2
Student View of Course Homepage



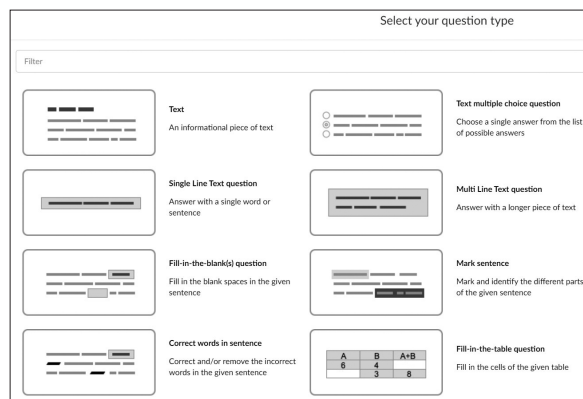
Using External Online Assignment Creation Tools

Microsoft Teams has few built-in assignment creation tools. The two primary options are Microsoft Forms quizzes, and Class Notebook pages in students' private sections, which are essentially Word documents that students can edit. This is a limited selection of activity types, especially when compared to an LMS such as Moodle. One solution to this issue is to use an external learning platform that integrates with Teams. In my course, I used Bookwidgets.

BookWidgets is an online platform for creating interactive educational content. The service offers a wide range of digital exercises, such as interactive quizzes, games, worksheets, and more. Figure 3 represents just a fraction of the available activity types. BookWidgets can be integrated with Teams (BookWidgets, 2022), and after activating integration, activities created in BookWidgets can be assigned to students in Teams, and grades for the activities will feed into Teams' gradebook. To activate integration,

the administrator of Microsoft 365 at your institution must grant permission. BookWidgets pricing is very reasonable: I pay 49 USD a year, and the number of student users is unlimited.

Figure 3
Sample of BookWidgets' Activity Types



Benefits of Teams as an LMS

In addition to Teams being a free LMS option, it offers several other benefits. It has an easy to use and visible notification system. Students receive a hard-to-miss notification in the Activity section of Teams when teachers post announcements to the team, when an assignment has been assigned, and when work has been graded and returned. Also, the evaluation and feedback feature in Teams is transparent and user friendly. Students can easily access assignment grades, view teacher feedback, and even respond to teacher feedback.

Drawbacks of Teams as an LMS

There are several drawbacks to using Teams as an LMS. In Japan, student names appear in kanji in a team, and there is no way to edit the names to display in the Roman alphabet. A sorting feature is not offered to allow the ordering of names in the members name list to be changed. Two other issues are that Teams does not have an attendance module and that the gradebook is extremely basic and cannot be edited. A solution to the attendance and gradebook issues is to use an external platform. *Additio* is one such platform that has both attendance and gradebook features, and has integration with Teams (Martin, 2022). The administrator of Microsoft 365 at your institution must grant permission for Additio integration with Teams to be possible.

Conclusion

Teams is a viable LMS option, and it is free for Microsoft 365 users. Teams is not as robust as an LMS such as Moodle, but with the homepage workaround and external tools, a class can be successfully managed using it. Despite the almost complete lack of information and literature about using Teams as an LMS, you can be assured that it works quite well.

References

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[JALT PRAXIS] YOUNGER LEARNERS



Martin Sedaghat & Emily MacFarlane

The Younger Learners column provides language teachers of children and teenagers with advice and guidance for making the most of their classes. Teachers with an interest in this field are also encouraged to submit articles and ideas to the editors at the address below. We also welcome questions about teaching, and will endeavour to answer them in this column.

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Adapting English Phonemic Awareness Instruction From L1 for Japanese Young Learners

Allison Murakami

If you think back to your preschool and kindergarten years, can you remember how your teachers reinforced language? There are likely infinite answers to this question. However, regardless of what the target language was, many will remember learning songs, chants, tongue twisters, clapping rhythms, or reading storybooks with catchy language. While there are many benefits to each of these activities, all of them support learning a crucial metalinguistic skill—phonemic awareness.

What is Phonemic Awareness?

Phonemic awareness, a subcategory of phonological awareness, is the understanding that oral language can be broken down into phonemes, the smallest units of sound in a language. Recognition

of phonemes allows speakers to hear and identify the components that make words different. For example, if the phoneme /c/ in “cat” is replaced with /m/ the word becomes “mat” instead of “cat” (initial phoneme substitution). When young learners can say that the first sounds in the words “cat” and “mat” are different and can correlate them to other words, then they are developing one of the phonemic awareness skills. Such differences in phonemes may seem inherent to adults, but children learning language tend to learn words for meaning rather than sounds (Mason, 1980). Furthermore, it can be difficult to detect all the phonemes in a language because they are often blended together (coarticulated) in syllables (Cutler & Otake, 1994). Developing phonemic awareness requires a great deal of direct instruction for children to notice the phonemes in a word.

Why is Phonemic Awareness Important?

With one of the purposes of language being communication, it may not seem like a priority to teach children to scrutinize oral language into individual sounds if they know the meaning of the word as a whole. Indeed, children learning English can still use oral language even before they have a chance to learn phonemes. However, the ability to analyze words for their sounds, and then to manipulate